

**Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing
March 10, 2021**

Testimony of Michele Jacklin

In support of
SB 1017 and HB 6578: An Act Concerning Election Administration; and An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process.

Good afternoon Sen. Flexer, Rep. Fox, Ranking members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

My name is Michele Jacklin and I'm a member of the board of Common Cause Connecticut, a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizens lobby working for open, honest and accountable government.

I urge your support for SB 1017, which would make ballot drop boxes, which were so easily and widely used during the 2020 primary and general election, a permanent fixture of our electoral system. It's no secret that the affixed, secure drop boxes were a huge success story last year as tens of thousands of Connecticut voters availed themselves of the self-serve system. I worked as an election official during both elections and I heard nary a critical word from anyone about the drop boxes. Indeed, voters were effusive in their praise and grateful for their availability.

The drop boxes were – and undoubtedly will continue to be – invaluable assets as the U.S. Postal Service's on-time delivery of first-class mail continues to decline due to mismanagement; bad weather; malfunctioning mail-sorting equipment; and high turnover of postal workers. Because of those factors, the on-time delivery of first-class mail plunged from 94 percent at the end of 2019 to 81.5 percent at the end of 2020. There is no way to tell if help is on the way and the decline will be reversed.

Thus, if voters who qualify to use absentee ballots want assurance that their ballots will arrive on time and be counted, they must be able to deposit their ballots in person and without fear that their ballots will be delayed, lost or sitting in a mailbag in the dusty corner of a post office in Tuscaloosa.

I also urge your support for HB 6578, which would enshrine in statute what is already occurring: automatically registering eligible citizens to vote (AVR) when they visit the state Department of Motor Vehicles. This automatic, electronic process has eliminated duplicate registrations and will significantly reduce the workload for municipal poll workers on Election Day.

Although this is a good first step, it doesn't go far enough. We need to extend AVR to other state agencies and institutions that citizens are likely to visit, such as the Department of Social Services and public colleges and universities.

In addition to eliminating outdated addresses and duplicate registrations, there's another excellent reason to automatically register eligible citizens. Again, as someone who has worked at the polls for several years, I have found that there are many people who think they are registered and – for whatever reason – are misinformed and show up at their polling place prepared to vote but are turned away because they aren't registered or their registration has lapsed. In many cases, this bill would prevent that from happening. The frustration level of would-be voters would be minimized or even eliminated.

Nineteen states have a version of AVR; Connecticut should become the twentieth.

Thank you,
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